

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is requested.

Claims 5-13 remain in the application. Claims 1-4 and 14-16 have been canceled. All of the remaining claims have been amended to eliminate the numeric references. Numeric references are not required under U.S. patent law and are given no patentable weight. Accordingly, the elimination of numeric references is not a narrowing amendment and is not an amendment entered for purposes of patentability.

Claims 1-4 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) in view of the publication of an earlier European patent owned partly by the assignee of the subject invention. Claims 1-4 have been canceled.

Claims 5-7 were objected to as depending from a rejected base claim. The Examiner indicated that claims 5-7 would be allow if rewritten or amended into independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Allowable claim 5 had depended directly from claim 1. Claim 5 has been amended into independent form including all the limitations of claim 1. Accordingly, amended claim 5 is believed to be in condition for allowance.

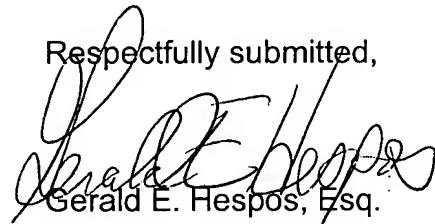
Claim 6 depends from allowable claim 5 and hence should be allow as well.

Allowable claim 7 had depended directly from claim 1. Claim 7 has been amended to incorporate all of the limitations of claim 1. Accordingly, amended claim 7 is believed to be in condition for allowance.

The applicants and the assignee are pleased to note that claims 8-13 were allowed as filed. Each of these claims remains in the application. The only amendments to allowable claims 8-13 are the elimination of the numeric references.

In view of the preceding amendments and remarks, it is submitted that all the claims remaining in the application are directed to patentable subject matter. Accordingly, a Notice of Allowance should be issued. The Examiner is urged to contact applicants' attorney at the number below if there are any remaining issues to be resolved.

Respectfully submitted,



Gerald E. Hespos, Esq.
Atty. Reg. No. 30,066
Customer No. 001218
CASELLA & HESPOS LLP
274 Madison Avenue - Suite 1703
New York, NY 10016
Tel. (212) 725-2450
Fax (212) 725-2452

Date: February 26, 2004